DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 248 424 CG 017 698

AUTHOR Johnson, William L.
TITLE The Formation of Adult Identity: A Review.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 22p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Development; *Adults; *Personality Development; Personality Theories; Philosophy; *Self Concept
IDENTIFIERS *Identity Formation

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of identity from philosophical, personal, and territorial perspectives. In the first section an historical perspective on identity is explored through the writings of Plato, Dupius, Josephus, and Thut. Twentieth century models of identity are related to the concepts of these writers of ancient Greece. In the second section, on personal identity, the ideas of modern theorists are highlighted, particularly the work of Erickson. In the following sections, the concepts of identity confusion and group identity are related to the definition of personal identity. The formation of individual identity is discussed in the context of family influence. Finally, future developments in the concept of personal identity are discussed. (MCF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED248424

The Formation of Adult Identity: A Review

William L. Johnson
Ambassador College
Big Sandy, TX

1984

CG 017698

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

William L. Johnson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

Various facets of identity are examined: philosophical, personal, and territorial. Twentieth century identity models are traced back to ancient Greece. The writings of Plato, Dupuis, Josephus, and Thut show that many of our ideas about identity are simply spinoffs of Greek thought.

Personal identity is explained in terms of Erikson's model of human growth and development. Erikson's contribution to the identity process is seen as his synthesis of theoretical, pathographic, genetic, and biographical findings which has given a psychosocial theory of development.

Next, personal identity is reviewed in the context of group identity. From the writings of Bettelheim, it is illustrated how Hitler's Gestapo tried to destroy personal identity to bring the prison populations of Dachau and Buchenwald into complete subjugation.

Recent scientific findings pertaining to identity and man's place in the relativistic universe are reviewed. It is shown that the home, as the building block of society, establishes territorial identity. Finally, human survival is linked to the establishment of a healthy identity.

The Formation Of Adult Identity: A Review

Popular writers have examined man's searching for some sense of belonging in a world where choice-and-chance have escalated tremendously. Social scientists have examined identity in the context of social interchange. But what exactly is the meaning of the word "identity"? What is philosophical identity? What does the meaning of personal identity entail? How does group identity interface with individual identity? Is identity an interaction of the genetic self and the environment? Can mankind's existence on earth be enhanced for the better by more fully understanding the processes of identity acquisition and destruction?

I want to look at identity in philosophical, personal, and group settings. In this manner, through reference to text sources and journal articles, identity will be defined. The approach is operational in nature, stating specific identity operations in terms of specific situations and explaining the consequences expected in each area investigated. Our world society is only now beginning to acquire the technical methodology to build an empirical base of knowledge to advance identity discussions into the world of biophysics and molecular biochemistry.

The Historical Perspective

Plato argued that there were three components of the human soul (Plato, pp.435-441). Consider a situation where a person is starving. The person finds food, but he has good reason to suspect that the food is poisoned. Plato argued that one segment of the person's mind (ID) would have coached him to eat, but a second component (EGO) forbade him. The first component was called desire or Appetite and the second was called Reason. The existence of a third component of the soul was proved, Plato believed, by cases of mental conflict where the person felt irate with himself (Stevenson, 1974). Thus reason, appetite and spirit were present in all men, but according to which was dominant, one of three types of men was seen in society: men emphasizing knowledge, gain or success in their personal lives (Plato, p.581). Plato believed, nevertheless, that reason should control spirit and appetite. The ideal man supposedly possessed the three elements in balance.

At the age of eighteen, Aristotle journeyed to Athens to study under Plato at the Academy. The influence of Plato on Aristotle was obviously great. Aristotle adopted most of Plato's teachings, although Plato's student was more realist than idealist (Dupuis, 1966). Likewise, Aristotle had an enormous influence on his student Alexander, the son of Philip of Macedon, who later became Alexander the Great (Thut, 1957). To illustrate this influence let us consider an incident from Alexander's life.

Josephus' account of segments of Alexander's life mentions that Alexander was in a dilemma about moving his armies across the Bosporus to invade Asia. In a dream a man told Alexander to cross "the sea" and secure the dominion of Persia. In Alexander's later years, when passing through the Middle East, and hearing of the wealth of Palestine, he stopped his armies and travelled to Jerusalem. There he was welcomed to the city by the man in his dream years before. The man was Jaddua, High Priest of Jerusalem (Josephus, p.345).

William McDougall wrote of the voice (daiuoviov) so frequently heard by Socrates, warning and advising him (McDougall, 1967). We see that individuals' identities were influenced, even to daily decision making, by these telephathic experiences. To what extent did the identity of the Greeks interface with telepathy? Since much of our social-educational systems is based on the writings of the Greeks, to what measure has telephathy shaped our lives in the twentieth century? For example, we have adopted the Greek motto, "a healthy mind in a strong body." We have emphasized mental and physical development in our schools. Our word gymnasium is the Greek word meaning "to train naked," seeing that the Greeks exercised naked in their gynmasiums.

As each person discovers his place in society, there is certainly no question of these profound Grecian influences, though these influences have journeyed across civilizations and millennia.

Having examined briefly the matter of philosophical identity, as it relates to ancient origins, it is illustrated that our

foundations of twentieth-century society have been linked to the identity forwarded from ancient Greece. I have also questioned the extent of the interface of the Grecian, societal structure and identity with telepathy. By taking this direction, I have laid some historical basis for my discussion of philosophical identity as this identity is transposed onto the inhabitants of the twentieth century. Next, let us examine personal identity.

Personal Identity

Perhaps a logical beginning would be with the essential core of the human infant. Maslow has written that this core is biologically based and "instinctoid." It is, he states, weak in certain senses rather than strong, and easily overcome, suppressed or repressed. Maslow has said that we may no longer think of a person as "fully determined," where this phrase implies determined solely by external forces. Likewise, this inner nature is definitely not primarily evil, but it is what might be called neutral or good. Seeing the nature as good, Maslow believes that a healthy child will, much of the time during his development, choose what is good for his growth (Maslow, 1962).

It should be recalled, nevertheless, that much of our educational system of rationalism is structured on the assumption that the curriculum is expected to discipline the mind in the ways of right thinking and harden the mind in the ways of task solution (Thut, 1957). The notion is that the mind is a bad substance which continues active till curbed by laborious study. The movements of naturalism, connectionism and cognitive theory have, however, argued that the inner core is not bad (Bigge, 1976).

Perhaps Freud was more realistic in his approach to the identity matter. Although he used the term "identity" only once, Freud made an interesting point. In an address to the Society of B'nai B'rith in Vienna in 1926, Freud tried to formulate his link with Judaism on the basis of an "inner identity" which was not based on race or religion, but on an identity which was free from the prejudices which narrowed the use of the intellect. Although Freud developed his comprehensive theory of human development, he did not address himself to the question of identity, its development, or its definition (Rachman, 1975).

Erikson summarized the questions of the genetic development of identity formation by saying that the inner core emerged as an evolving configuration. This configuration, in Erikson's words, was "gradually established by successive ego syntheses and resyntheses throughout childhood." (Erikson, 1963).

However Erikson also acknowledged that the problem of identity was all-pervasive. He referred to identity being established in the core of the individual and in the core of the community. Individual identity was thus viewed as a total of these two components.

In addressing the question of identity formation as a coupling of the individual core and the community, Erikson developed his psychosocial theory of human growth and development through the life cycle. His "Eight Stages of Man" theory looked especially at the crucial role of the adolescence period of development.

Accompanying the successful resolution of each stage of development (crisis), a virtue develops. The initial psychosocial crisis develops in early infancy. This stage determines whether or not the child's feelings toward others will be those of basic trust or mistrust.

The second crisis will establish whether the child will be autonomous or act out shame and doubt. The outcome of this stage is will power.

Following the second stage is the third crisis interval of ages three to five involving initiative versus guilt. The outcome of this stage is a sense of purpose.

The fourth crisis involves industry versus inferiority. During this stage, the child becomes eager to learn and interact with others. The resolution of this stage yields a sense of skill and competency.

Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial crisis, the identity crisis of adolescence, constitutes a focal point of the author's theory of growth and development. The crisis involves the development of individual and group identity. The negative aspects of this period, identity confusion, cluster as feelings of personal confusion and social imperfection. The resolution of this crisis produces a person who can relate well with a group and who is capable of adhering to ideological views.

The sixth stage is the crisis of intimacy and isolation. This interval is a crisis of early adulthood. Since the young person has resolved the crisis of stage five, he can move toward intimate association with others. Intimacy is then a fusing of identities. The outcome of this stage is mature love and marriage.

Generativity and stagnation are the essence of the seventh stage. The person begins to take his particular place in the society. Erikson's last stage is old age and maturity. At this point in life, integrity and despair compete. Wisdom is the product of the successful resolution of this final stage (Erikson, 1968).

Personality development, thus, is seen as a process which continues throughout life. At certain times in one's life, related to genetic and environmental conditions, a potential crisis stage is approached. The problems of each stage must be resolved before the person can advance to the next crisis stage. By successfully resolving the crisis, the person's identity is enhanced. But it should be understood that identity appears as only one concept within a wider conception of human life cycles. Childhood is then a gradual unfolding of the personality through specific psychosocial stages. But how does Erikson's theory relate with Freud's theory of human growth and development?

Erikson has said that his theory has its origins in Freud's psychosexual model (Evans, 1969). Yet Erikson's theory is a significant refinement in psychosocial modeling, for Erikson fuses the genetic and environmental components of identity to provide a working model. Coles states that Erikson provided mankind with a working model of an entire man's life, not just man as a child (Coles, 1970).

At this point, identity is seen as a product of genetic and environmental components keyed through culture, the home, religion and the person's particular genetic structure. Identity has been thus defined as the product of the roles a person has

played and the feelings toward the self as contained in those roles (Yorburg, 1974).

Yorburg has stated that sexual identity is the sum of male and/or female roles as taught to little children by their cultures. Gardner agrees with this conclusion and has stated that even play is not just play, but that it is the learning of an identity (role), and it is a mechanism to develop a particular skill (Gardner, 1951).

Chisholm defined identity as "persistence through time" (Keifer, 1970). Note, however, that Erikson put identity into a total-personality development system.

Parsons wrote that identity cannot be understood apart from four main sets of variables: (1) fundamental behavior psychology, (2) allocative processes, (3) defense and adjustment mechanisms, and (4) integration of need dispositions into the on-going personality matrix. Parsons refines Erikson's ideas. Witness Parsons' delineation of patterns of value orientation and his categorization of learning mechanisms. I have not found Parsons to refute Erikson, but only to strengthen Erikson's theory in its relation to identity formation.

Harlow has stated that identity is a person's sense of himself and a source of security. However, growth and development involve change, and all change means giving up security. Thus, the establishment of new identity is potentially anxiety arousing (Harlow, 1971).

Patterson agrees with Erikson in his definition of identity, defining identity as self image, self concept, or the core concept

of one's own self (Patterson, 1973). Bronowski has likewise defined the identity of man as being the sum of man's knowledge of nature and of himself (Bronowski, 1965).

Piaget has written that identity is but one element of the total system of the human personality. Identity changes with development, Piaget states. But the change is a transformation process performed by the system itself (Piaget, 1968). Piaget's work refutes Bruner who says that language alone imposes mental structure and that operations are simply identities, generalized through language (Bruner, 1966). Piaget says this approach is incorrect because the mind would then develop much faster.

Erikson (1958) looked at the problem biographically and concluded that we cannot separate personal growth and community change. Erikson studied the life of William James to further formulate how biography interfaces with identity (James, 1920). Erikson (1963) studied severly conflicted youth. He noted, from his biographical work, that the traditional remnants of identity were economic, religious, and political in nature. Erikson then combined his clinical, biographical, and genetic observations to synthesize his psychosocial theory of development. The origins and definitions of identity were then placed into an operational system. That system was Erikson's theory of stages. Erikson neither denies that he went to Freud's ideas, not does he deny referring to various authors and their works: Mead, Mind, Self and Society, 1934; Sullivan, The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry, 1953; Schilder, The Image and Appearance of the Human Body, 1950; and Federn, Ego Psychology and the Psychoses, 1955 (Erikson, 1968).

Having examined an overview of research and likewise discussed philosophical identity, having looked at Erikson's theory in the light of personal identity and development, and having examined various definitions of identity, how do these concepts relate to identity confusion and group identity? Let us first examine identity confusion.

Identity Confusion

Mankind's existence on this planet can certainly be enhanced for the better by more fully understanding the process of identity acquisition. For if we understand a process, then we can be free of its unwieldy terror.

The adolescent stage of development has been described as a crisis interval similar to a "developmental psychosis" (Blos, 1962). This time period corresponds to Erikson's fifth crisis stage involving identity and identity confusion. Yet the author showed that this fifth stage was a normative "identity crisis" to the age of adolescence and young adulthood (Erikson, 1968).

Fishman also noted that a major task of adolescence was "the need for the development and confirmation of both self and social identity" (Fishman, 1964). Solomon has likewise written that identity confusion for the adolescent consists of both identification with and rebellion against parents and the past. Social change may come so rapidly that adults and youth will experience still greater tension than in a society without such rapid change (Solomon, 1964). Glasser has written that todays youth, beginning in the 1950s, placed role orientation before

goal orientation. Their parents, not understanding their children's source of motivation, threw up their hands in disgust and frustration (Glasser, 1972). Just as Erikson has stressed the value of industry rather than inferiority, Glasser has looked at the impact of failure on the self-concept. Glasser agrees with Erikson that students must develop a sense of identity. Glasser writes that they will develop a positive identity if they are to become involved in life and achieve success.

Fishman further states that identity problems need be examined in light of the emergent social values of the society (Fishman, 1964). The sources of identity confusion in adolescents can be attributed to numerous sources: (1) chance association with a peer or group or "cause" curing adolescence or early adulthood, (2) identification with or rebellion against attitudes and values of one's parents, (3) social and cultural influences, and (4) various features of adolescence itself. These sources further explain Erikson's findings.

These authors are popularized by Toffler (1970): "The individual searching for some sense of belonging, looking for the kind of social connection that confers some sense of identity, moves through a blurry environment in which the possible targets of affiliation are all in high-speed motion. He must choose from a growing number of moving targets." Next, how do these authors' writings relate with group identity?

Group Identity

Erikson has written that sociogenetic struggle has split mankind into pseudo-species, tribes, nations and religions, classes and castes with their members being bound into patterns of individual and collective identity. The pattern is reinforced by the fear of and the hatred of other species (Erikson, 1965). Erikson explains today's world violence as the result of a breakdown of group identity. Such group identity may be feudal, agrarian, tribal, or national (Erikson, 1968). Collective individual identity then comprises group identity. As individuals become more isolated, group identity begins to decay. The world, Erikson writes, is experiencing a breakdown of group identity.

Parsons has written that cultural patterns must be integrated with the affective system of the personality. Cathexis of an object is a focal aspect of identification, with identification being the internalization of a generalized role pattern.

Foote has stated that successive families have had a larger share in constituting one's identity as a person than any other institution of society (Foote, 1955). Thus family groups, in which every member backs up all the other members, are a fundamental element in the establishment of a person's identity. In fact, Bettleheim writes that this precise principle was used during World War II in the formulation of resistance to the psychological techniques of the Gestapo in the German concentration camps at Dachau and Buchenwald. The author, who spent about a year at Dachau and Buchenwald as a political prisoner, documented that

the tactics of the "Elite" formations of the "SS" groups were directed toward acquiring experimental data in their death camps. The data was a study of the means of breaking human resistance and producing changes in the prisoners which would make them more useful subjects. The death camps were the Gestapo's laboratories where methods were developed for changing free citizens into serfs who, in many aspects, accepted their masters' values. The prisoners were to think that they were following their own life goals and values, whereas they had actually accepted Nazi values as their own (Bettelheim, 1943).

The author states that the Gestapo found that individualism made the person more resistant to the pressures of the "Elite SS"; thus, the Nazis forced all individuals into supervised groups. Such tactics as group punishment were used when an individual of the group was deviant. Futhermore, the Gestapo opposed solitary activities of any kind. Bettelheim states that the main goal seemed to be to generate childlike attitudes and dependence on the part of the prisoners.

It is important to notice that the formation of groups of resistance, whereby every member backed up every other member, was found by the author to be the most decisive way to break the Gestapo's influence. Otherwise, individuals experienced slow personality disintegration. The Nazi system was simply too strong for an individual to break the hold over his emotional life, particularly if he was in a group which partly accepted the Nazi system.

Thus we see that isolation initiates group decay. Furthermore, fear helps to destroy group identity. We have seen how important it is that culture and the affective systems of the individual be integrated. The family has thus been especially important in establishing individual identity. Finally, the Gestapo, through its prison system, developed a methodology to disintegrate human will and identity.

The Future

But where do we go from here? Bronowski has shown that, if a human brain calculated the many steps involved in putting a dot at the end of this sentence as a computer would do, then the precision which would be required in the sequence of steps would require each step to be accurate to at least ten decimal places. But the electric mechanisms of brain and central nervous system cannot work at any step at more than three decimal places (we know this by the mode of transmission of electrical signals in the body). The brain is thus at least ten million times too coarse to work by the methods of man-made computers (Bronowski, 1965). Furthermore, Bronowski has written that the signal "red" cannot be sent without a message about the shape of the thing that evokes it. These two seemingly unconnected factors interrelate. It would seem that there could be no identity link between color and shape.

We are now beginning to understand how light quanta untwist the molecules of color and how this chemical change is integrated electrically in the eye and the signal transmitted to the brain.

The mathematics of relativity has shown that the universe is not simply a machine. The basic false picture generated by classical physics and philosophy was that we look at the mechanistic, nature machine from the outside. The newer model of identity generates different perspectives of our universe.

In an article in Science magazine, an appraisal was given for impending crises in the United States. Problems were graded. For example, grade eight was noncrisis problems like man in space and basic science; grade seven was problems whose dangers and hopes are exaggerated, like mind control, heart transplants and the definition of death. Grade six was other problems now being researched: military research and development, new educational methods, mental illness and fusion power. At grade five was problems which would bring tension demanding change, like cancer and heart problems, smoking and drugs, artificial organs, accidents, sonic boom, water supply, marine resources and privacy on computers. Grade four was problems that would bring large-scale distress, like transportation problems, neighborhood ugliness and crime. Grade three involved problems which would bring widespread, almost unbearable tension on the society. Examples included racial conflict, administrative management, slum problems, and participatory democracy. Grade two involved situations which would generate great destruction or change to everyone, like elemental balance or problems of political control. Grade one was circumstances which could annihilate all life from the earth. Problems like nuclear and chemical-biological warfare were included. It was noted that grade eight problems, which could not lead to annihilation,

involved mostly scientific work. We are now becoming aware of the seriousness of grade two problems and at grade one, the most serious of all problems, there is no concerted scientific or political effort toward a solution. The author gave humanity no more than a fifty percent chance of surviving until 1990.

I conclude specifically that we must investigate solutions to the critically-graded problems mentioned by Platt. Additionally, we must strengthen the home and the extented family as the building element of society.

References

Bettelheim, Bruno. The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1943, 38, 417-452.

Bigge, Morris L. Learning Theories for Teachers. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976.

Blos, Peter. On Adolescence: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation. New York: The Free Press, 1962.

Bronowski, J. The Identity of Man. Garden City, New Jersey: The Natural History Press, 1965.

Bruner, J.S. Studies in Cognitive Growth. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966.

Coles, Robert. Erik H. Erikson: The Growth of His Work. Boston: Little and Brown, 1970.

Dupuis, Adrian. Philosophy of Education in Historical Perspective. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966.

Erikson, Erik H. Childhood and Society. New York: W.W. Norton, 1963.

Erikson, Erik H. Identity: Youth and Crisis. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1968.

Erikson, Erik H. The American Journal of Psychiatry, 1965, 122, 241-250.

Erikson, Erik H. Young Man Luther, A Study in Psychoanalysis and History. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1958.

Evans, Richard I. Dialogue with Erik Erikson. New York: Dutton, 1969.

Federn, Paul. Ego Psychology and the Psychoses. New York: Basic Books, 1955.

Fishman, Jacob R. The Journal of Social Issues, 1964, 20, 3.

Foote, Nelson N. Identity and Interpersonal Competence. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955.

Gardner, George E. (Ed.). American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 1951, 21, 667-692.

Glasser, William. The Identity Society. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972.

Harlow, Harry F. Psychology. San Francisco: Albion Publishing Company, 1971.

James, Henry. (Ed.). The Letters of William James. Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920, 1, 199.

Josephus, Flavius. The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus (William Whiston, trans.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Keifer, Milton K. (Ed.). Language, Belief, and Metaphysics. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1970.

McDougall, William. William McDougall--Explorer of the Mind. New York: Garrett Publications, 1967.

Maslow, Abraham. Toward a Psychology of Being. Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1962.

Mead, George H. Mind, Self and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

Parsons, Talcott. (Ed.). Toward a General Theory of Action. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.

Parsons, Talcott. Social Structure and Personality. London: Collier-MacMillan Ltd., 1964.

Patterson, C.H. Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy. London: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973.

Piaget, Jean. On the Development of Memory and Identity (Heinz Werner Lectures, University of Paris, trans.). Clark University Press, Barre Publishers, 1968.

Plato. Republic (H.D.P. Lee, trans.). London: Penguin, 1955.

Platt, J. Science, 1969, 166, 1115-1121.

Rachman, Arnold W. Identity Group Psychotherapy with Adolescents. Springfield: Bannerstone House, 1975.

Schilder, Paul. The Image and Appearance of the Human Body. New York: International Universities Press, 1950.

(Secondary Source). Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 1956, 4, 58-121. (Freud, Sigmund, "Address to the Society of B'nai B'righ," 1926, Standard Edition, 20:273, London: Hogarth Press, 1959).

Solomon, Fredric. The Journal of Social Issues, 1964, 20, 36-45.

Stein, Maruice R. Identity and Anxiety. London: Collier-Mac Millan Limited, 1960.

Stevenson, Leslie. Seven Theories of Human Nature. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Sullivan, Harry S. The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1953.

Thut, I.N. The Story of Education. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1957.

Toffler, Alvin. Future Shock. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1970.

Yorburg, Betty. Sexual Identity. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974.